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Joshua Lederberg

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Mr. Charles Witter
Professional Staff Member
Special Studies Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations
Rayburn House Office Building, Room B377
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Witter:

I have had your letter of May 28 in mind since receiving it; and it coincided ~~my~~ with ~~my~~ already formed intentions of commenting at some length on some human issues raised by computer technology.

Perhaps you have already seen the first of a series of articles on this theme, starting in the Washington Post for July 26. The piece scheduled for this ~~XXXXX~~ Saturday may be of even more direct interest to you and Mr. Gallagher, since it takes up the very constructive actions of the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

Unfortunately, most of the comment in this field (e.g. Jerry Rosenberg's book) has been more arousing than constructive, and I think it is high time we looked for specific legislative actions that would do better than merely dump the National Data Center into limbo. The FCRA is an excellent first step; I would be most interested to learn of additional, positive measures that have been proposed in order to meet our legitimate concerns. I am thinking through some measures of this kind myself -- like the protection of statistical data banks by entrusting them to special corporations, as proposed in my 7/26 article. But I would be very grateful for leads to other measures that may have been ventilated by Mr. Gallagher or before his committee.

The right to a "second-chance" that he spoke about is too precious to leave it to the odds of neglect, whether the files are computerized or not. But it ought to be applied as a matter of principle in other cases, like those summarized in the enclosed Science article. Will Mr. Gallagher have the courage to apply his reasoning to these circumstances?

I also enclose a summary of the SRI analysis of the replies to the FCC inquiry on computer-communications. Unless your committee is indeed pursuing material legislation to cover these situations, many of these correspondents are going to be disappointed.

May I also call your attention to an excellent review by Lance Hoffman in the current issue of Computing Surveys.

Could I ask you to get me a copy of the Long subcommittee hearings of March 1967?

Yours sincerely,

I have been trying to document and understand that first paragraph. It makes about as much sense as inveighing against the telephone book or the voter-registration records. Since Napoleon, the movements of citizens in European cities generally (until very recently) were routinely controlled by obligatory reports to the police, e.g., of hotel registrations, and required some form of internal passport. These are not confidential records; but are obviously subject to potential abuse, and I have no ~~intent~~ intention of proposing or defending this kind of personal registration.

I do not think this kind of analogy is very helpful to clear thinking about concrete arrangements to prevent, deter and punish real abuses.

PREFACE

Joshua Lederberg

When Adolf Hitler was aspiring to the Chancellorship of Germany, he acquired the confidential European Census and used it to weed out some of his potential antagonists. }

With the advance of technology, centralized data accumulation becomes easier, the reward for intrusion is increased, and control shifts to still fewer people. *than Hitler?*

Should we not be concerned about a computerized federal data center that could collect, store and distribute information about every one of us? Although the data may be acquired in a Constitutionally sound fashion, its use could present the greatest threat to our remaining right to individual privacy.

Likewise, as computerized data facilities are established in nongovernmental institutions, the issue of privacy and information leakage may become more explosive since laws are less able to enter the hidden corridors and file systems in industry, labor and education. In the private sector, management's disinterest in the privacy issue or in safeguards of data retrieval may invite resistance.